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Herbal Medicine and Pediatric Massage: Interning at a TCM Pediatric Clinic

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Herbal Medicine and Pediatric Massage: Interning at a TCM Pediatric Clinic

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SIT China: Health, Environment, and Traditional Chinese Medicine

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Abstract

Before entering this program my knowledge of TCM was practically nonexistent. However even from a young age, I had an interest in learning about the healing properties of plants and herbs but, I had no way of exploring this interest of mine. After entering this program, I have learned more about TCM and herbal medicine. Because of the lessons that we have taken in class, it made me want to have a deeper understanding of TCM because of this, I decided to do an internship that would involve TCM. My time at Yang Zhen Er Kang clinic has taught me much about pediatric massage and herbal medicine. I have not only been taught about massage therapy and herbal medicine but I have also learned what it is like to work in a business in China, the difference between an American work environment and a Chinese work environment. Throughout the internship, I have faced several different difficulties but have learned to overcome them. I believe that this experience has been able to help me understand more about TCM and Chinese culture.

Introduction

Traditional Chinese Medicine has a history of over 2,000 years, within that time it has grown and has changed into what we know it as today. Many different components make up Traditional Chinese Medicine, acupuncture, massage therapy, music therapy, cupping, moxibustion, and herbal medicine. The core of TCM revolves around the balance Yin and Yang as well as the 5 main organs (heart, spleen, lung, kidney, stomach) which corresponds to the 5 elements (fire, earth, metal, water, wood). While western medicine is more analytical and evidence-based which relies on science, Traditional Chinese Medicine is holistic and relies on ancient teachings. With the introduction to western medicine in eastern society, many people believe that the two make good compliments to each other both covering one another weaknesses.

Although Traditional Chinese Medicine is slow to catch on in Western society, this is because westerners believe more in having evidence to back up one's claim. However, more and more ideas that have originated from TCM are becoming more increasingly integrated into western healthcare, such as acupuncture and herbal medicine. However, the very basics of TCM such as the 5 main organs and the idea of Qi are not well known in Western society. Although, people are slowly opening up to the idea of TCM and it is becoming slowly popular. Even though TCM is slow to be integrated into Western society it has made a major impact in other Asian cultures such as Korea and Japan. Both country's traditional medicine has taken the knowledge from TCM and branched off to create their own. As mentioned earlier I was interested in learning more about the herbal and through the SIT program, my interest in TCM increased. Through my internship, I had hoped to gain more general knowledge about TCM and learn about massage techniques and the different acupressure points in adults and children. I also expected to learn about different types of herbs and their healing properties.

Introduction to the Clinic

Yang Zhen Er Kang is located in an underground shopping mall beneath some apartment complexes. When you first enter the clinic there is a receptionist desk where patients are greeted and can check-in, pay, and schedule their next appointment. Inside the clinic there is a waiting room for the parents/ grandparents and their children, since the clinic is a pediatric clinic there is a play area for children with Legos, toys, and children's books to play with while they wait for their session to start. There is also a meeting area which has a long table where staff eats lunch and also holds meetings with patients, there is also a projector and screen for meetings and lessons. Behind the meeting area, there is a small kitchen for staff to hold to their lunch and for both staff and parents to have water to drink. Within the facility, there are three rooms, two of

which are for the pediatric massage. In the pediatric massage room, there are two examination tables for patients, one couch in each room, some cabinets for storing items, and a few extra stools for the parents/ grandparents to sit closer to the child if they get nervous during the massage or for any extra guest. The last room in the clinic is for adult massage. The adult massage room has a similar set up to the pediatric massage room but there is a screen between the two examination tables, this is because adult massage may require the patient to remove their shirt, so the screen is there for privacy. There is another room where the herbal medicine is stored it is also the place where tea and soups are prepared and packaged for patients. Finally, there is a tiny room for staff to sleep in during break and bathroom with a washer machine that is used to wash any towels or rags that were used and also keep cleaning supplies.

The clinic is open 7 days a week from about 9 am to around 8 pm, the clinic closing time varies between 5 pm to 8 pm because the doctors want to make it convenient for their patients. This means that if someone schedules an appointment for after 5 the clinic will stay open until after the last appointment is done, but if the last appointment for the day is before 5 then they will close at 5. For pediatric massage, the ages are between newborn and 14 years old. This is because the location of most acupressure points changes from child to adult. Before a child is 7 most of their acupressure points are below the wrist and mostly on the hand. Once a child reaches about 7 years old, they have a lot of their adult acupressure points but their body is still too weak to handle adult massage. While interning at the clinic the youngest patient there was a baby that was one month old. The busiest time for the clinic tends to be in the mornings and the early afternoon, the clinic is most busy during Saturdays when there is an overflow of patients. There are 5 main staff members at the facility. Huang 老师 is the main doctor at the clinic however since the clinic is so busy the other doctors help her to lessen the burden of having to

take care of so many patients. Whenever, Huang 老师 is out, even for multiple days, due to having to give lectures at different universities she can leave the clinic without stress because she knows that her staff can handle the clinic just fine without her. While each doctor can perform pediatric massage and has patients, they all takes turn being at reception and sometimes even cover for each other patients so that another doctor can have a small break. The atmosphere at the clinic especially between the staff is very friendly and warm. When at the clinic I often saw all the doctors laughing and eating with each other, however, the staff is not only friendly towards each other but also with the parents/ grandparents. Normally during a massage session, the doctors can casually talk to the parents not only about the health of the child but also about daily things, whenever the doctors are not busy, I often see them talking to parents who are still in the waiting room waiting to be helped by a different doctor.

This is exactly the type of atmosphere the Huang 老师 was looking for when she first opened the clinic a few years ago. After graduating from school in 2005 Huang 老师 worked at a Yunnan Provincial Hospital which was a large hospital in Kunming, since this was a large hospital Huang 老师 would see many patients, roughly around 30 patients a day. The conditions that she worked in became too stressful for her. Not only did she never get the rest that she needed (only barely having enough time for lunch), but then had to work long hours each shift. She felt that these working conditions were bad for her health both mentally and physically. Since each day she would see many different patients, she felt that she was never giving each patient the treatment and attention that they deserved. In 2015 she left the hospital and opened her own clinic which was located in a small studio. When she first opened the clinic, she had very few patients averaging about 3 to 5 people. This was because no one understood the importance of pediatric massage, after 3 years she had gained more and more patients and was

able to move her business from the studio to the underground mall area where it is today. She was also able to hire other staff members to help support her as her clientele grew larger.

Overview of the Internship

My internship period lasted from October 31st to November 29th. During this time, I lived in an apartment by myself about 20 minutes away by bus. My internship started at 9:30 am and normally when I entered, I would greet everyone. If Huang 老师 and Xiao 老师 were already busy with patients I would wait at the meeting table until they were done with their patients and could help me. In the first few days of the internship, I did not have much to do in the morning so while waiting I would play on my phone for a bit. However, as time progressed and I began to learn about massage, TCM, and herbal medicine, I would study and review my notes. I would also practice any acupressure points I had learned the day before.

At the start of my internship, I followed Huang 老师 as she met and treated patients. As I watched her perform massage therapy, she would tell me a little bit about the patients. She would tell me the child's name, their conditions, symptoms, and the causes for their condition. Then, she would tell me the pressure point she was massaging and the function for that pressure point. For most of my time spent at the clinic, Huang 老师 taught three other Chinese students about acupressure and child massage techniques. In the mornings the 4 of us would review all the material we had learned and practiced massage therapy on each other. For acupressure points that were hard to do on each other, such as points on the stomach or the chest, we would use small bean bags that were used to practice massage techniques.

About a week into my internship I began to learn how to make different types of teas and soups for the patients. I was taught the different types of herbal medicine by Xiao 老师 who I would begin to shadow instead. In the mornings instead of following Huang 老师 to each of her

appointments, I would follow Xiao 老师 who taught me about the different types of teas and soups. After a few days of learning about the different types of teas and soups Xiao 老师 would teach me about the different types of herbs used in the clinic and the purpose and properties of each of the herbs in relation to Traditional Chinese Medicine. Each morning Xiao 老师 would teach me the properties of three to five different herbs and then I would review them. Around noon we would all take a break to eat lunch. Lunch lasted from noon to about 2 pm. During lunchtime we would all eat together, (normally someone would buy lunch for all of us to share or someone would help me find a place to eat). After eating we would clean up and then use the remainder of the time to relax. Some of the doctors would take a nap in one of the side rooms or talk to each other or watch videos on their phones. At around 2 pm the 3 students and I would meet in the meeting area and Huang 老师 would give us a lesson in TCM or massage therapy. This typically lasted from 2 pm to 5 pm with some breaks in the middle, after the lecture was over, we could normally head home for the day. Every Friday we would meet Huang 老师 at the second clinic she worked and she would give us our lectures there. If Huang 老师 was too busy to give us a lecture than one of the other doctors would take over. In the last two weeks of the internship, Huang 老师 was busy giving lectures at different universities. Since she was gone, I received my lecture from Xiao 老师 who finished teaching me about TCM basics and pediatric massage.

Overall Experiences

My time interning at Yang Zhen Er Kang clinic has been a very rewarding and exciting experience and I am very appreciative of the opportunity to have been able to work there. Through the internship, I have made many accomplishments and have learned many important

different skills. Not only have I learned a lot about TCM and herbal medicine, but I have also learned a lot about the Chinese work environment, how Chinese clinics differ from American clinics, and more about myself. During the month that I worked at the clinic, I feel as though despite my introverted and shy nature I have made new friends and if there is ever a chance that I find myself back in Kunming I know I would love to visit again. This is not to say that I didn't have to overcome several different difficulties during the internship. There were 3 major difficulties that I had to learn how to overcome while at the clinic.

The first major difficulty I had to learn how to overcome was the language barrier between me and my co-workers. Although I had been learning Chinese for 3 years, I was far from fluent and my ability to understand others was also lacking. The language barrier made it difficult for me to connect with my co-workers and the other students I was studying with. The PowerPoint lessons that Huang 老师 would give us were all written in Chinese so I never understood what the PowerPoint said. She would always explain what was on the PowerPoint first to the other students then I would wait until after she was done explaining so she could translate for me. I am very thankful that she put in the extra effort of translating for me however, there were times when she could not give me a translation and I did not understand what was going on. An example of this is when she would explain to the parents about their child's condition or if one of the other students had a question and she was giving them an answer. Whenever I attempted to speak Chinese to my co-workers there were multiple times when they could not understand what I was trying to say. To solve this issue, we often used translation apps on our phones for easier communication, it allowed us to translate what we wanted to say and words we didn't know. During lectures with Huang 老师, I would listen when she was speaking

in Chinese so I could try to improve my listening skills. When I was with Xiao 老师 she and I would practice speaking Chinese and English together which help improve my Chinese.

The second issue I had to overcome was having limited knowledge about Traditional Chinese Medicine. Thanks to the SIT program lectures we had before the internship period I had a very basic idea of TCM. Once receiving my first lecture I quickly learned that I did not know nearly as much as I thought I did and that I had to face a very large learning curve. There were several times in the lectures where I did not understand what Huang 老师 or Xiao 老师 where telling me simply because my understanding of TCM was so limited. Whenever they saw that I was having trouble understanding a subject, they would reword it so that I could understand them. Sometimes after lessons, I would have a lot of questions about TCM, most of the time depending on if the question was easy to answer, such as “What does it mean to have a heat or fire in the body?”, they would be able to give me an answer. There were a few times when they couldn’t answer my question because they thought it would be too hard for me to understand, for example, “How can someone tell the difference between the several different types of coughs?”, normally when this happened I would just have to wait a few extra lessons before my questions were answered, more often than not I understood why they thought the answer was too complicated for me to understand and why they told me to wait. In order to learn more about TCM and understand the lectures better I would copy down everything that Huang 老师 and Xiao 老师 would tell me. Then when I went home, I would review each of my notes of what I have learned that day. I also looked up some information about TCM on my own to help me study when I was confused about something.

The last major issue I had while interning was adjusting to the Chinese work culture. The American work culture compared to the Chinese work culture is very different. Personally, I

believe that the American work environment is stricter and the Chinese work environment is more relaxed. It was a very different setting than what I was normally used to, so adjusting took some time. The American working culture is more task-oriented, this means when you go into work that day there is a set number of tasks that you have to complete before you go home for the day. The Chinese work environment is more time-oriented, meaning that within the hours that you are working there is no specific task that you should be doing. Instead, you have to take the initiative and find things to do around the workplace. It is very likely that your boss will not tell you what you are supposed to do for the day when you walk in, you are expected to find something that is supposed to be done and keep yourself busy throughout the day. Because I was still learning how to do pediatric massage and was also not allowed to practice on any of the patients (this was a new rule for all SIT programs for students that were doing an internship), there were many times that I found myself without any work to do. It often felt as though I was in the way because I could not help any of the doctors. So instead of not doing anything or playing on my phone, I would try to find things to do. Since I was only in the clinic for such a short amount of time the doctors didn't want me to do a lot of the cleaning and tried to treat me as a guest. To show I did not want to be treated like a guest and that I wanted to be entrusted with responsibilities I would start cleaning without asking if they needed help and eventually, they gave me some task to complete. Whenever I wasn't shadowing the other doctors or in a lecture, I would sit and review my notes, try to memorize what each of the herbs looked like, or tried to practice the different massage techniques. I would also clean up the playing area after the children were done playing with them.

Outputs and Outcomes

Knowledge

During my month interning at the clinic, I have learned a lot. I learned much about Traditional Chinese Medicine, herbal medicine, and pediatric massage. Before starting the internship, I knew that the heart, spleen, kidney, lungs, and liver were the 5 main organs of the bodies. However, I didn't know how they all interacted with each other and how each of the organs affected the body. I learned the difference between a hot body and a cold body and what the main causes of those symptoms were. I also learned how different types of foods (such as sweet, spicy, or salty) affected the body and when the best time of the year would be to eat certain types of foods or herbs and why. I first learned the name and TCM function of over 30 different kinds of herbs. As well as whether the herbs are best used in soups or teas. Finally, I also learned over 20 different children acupressure points and where they are located as well as their functions. The doctors have also taught me what was the best time of day to give a massage. For example, if a child is deficient in Yang then the best time to do massage is in the morning to noon because that is when Yang is at its strongest. Similarly, if a child is deficient in Yin the best time to do the massage is at night, not only is Yin strongest at night but it will help the child sleep. I also know what type of questions to ask parents to understand what illness their child may have. This is important so the doctor can figure out how exactly they should treat the child and what will heal them faster. Because massage therapy dries and damages the skin, doctors use several different products to help protect the skin during massage. These products are lotions, water (normally warm), baby powder, and oil (made out of ginger, alcohol, and onion). Each product is used at certain points during the massage because each product can help with healing different illnesses. Since the majority of the patients at the clinic are only a few years old, most of them get upset whenever the doctors touch them. There are also times when the massage can be uncomfortable for the child and causes them to start crying or to start squirming trying to

getaway. This makes it very difficult for the doctor to perform the therapy, if a child is too unruly then the doctor will be unable to perform the massage. Whenever this happens, doctors and parents attempt to call the child down. They normally do this in several different ways. The first way is singing to them, normally if someone in the room starts to sing then the baby will quiet down for a bit to listen to them sing. The second is playing them a video or giving them a toy to play with. Normally, after this happens the child will get distracted by the thing in front of them and forget about the massage. Finally, if the child is a little older the parent promises them candy if they behave for the rest of the session.

Skills

The skills that I have learned at the internship is very similar to the knowledge that I have also learned, but I have learned some very important life skills. The first life skill I have learned was how to navigate in China alone. Before the internship, I normally traveled around with my friends and we would all work together to figure out how to get our destination, however since I was living alone for the internship, I had to figure out how to do everything by myself. It only took me a few days to memorize which bus I could take that would take me from where I lived to either my internship or where my friends lived. Other skills I have learned was how to be more confident speaking Chinese. Since I was by myself, I had to do things like buying food, items and ask questions without the help of anyone else. Doing this for a month helped me feel more confident in what I wanted to say and how to form the sentence to say it correctly.

There were many skills that I had learned while at the internship. The first skill was learning the different massage techniques which were moufa, nafa, anfa, rofa and tuifa. Moufa is a flat palm circle motion on large areas of the body such as the stomach. Nafa is a grabbing motion that is used on the neck, shoulder, legs, and arms. Anfa is a pushing motion that is

continuously on the acupressure point and doesn't move. Rofa is a pressing motion on the acupressure point that is moved in a circular motion. Tuifa is similar to anfa because they are both pushing motion but tuifa is in one direction. To practice these techniques the 3 other students and I would practice on each other and help correct each other's form and correct if we were doing the technique wrong. After 2 or 3 weeks when the other students had finished their classes and left the clinic, Xiao 老师 would allow me to practice on her and she would correct me if I did something wrong. My first full week at the internship I learned how to make "Qingre Ruzao tea" this tea helped for a cough or a fever, "Jianpi tea" which helped improve the spleen which in TCM is connected to the stomach so it helped with most stomach issues. I learned how to make soup for people who are low on energy and also a soup for someone who has a mouth ulcer because they have eaten too many sweets. Three weeks into the internship the doctors taught me how to perform qijiao moxibustion. It is similar to regular moxibustion but instead, it uses a ceramic cup and is not as hot as regular moxibustion. It is also placed over the bellybutton to help with bad bones. During the third week and last week, I learned the symptoms and treatment for illnesses such as the common cold, stomach ache, and fever.

Awareness

At the start of my internship, there were many things that I've come to learn just by looking and listening in my environment. When I first came to the clinic, I was under the impression that the clinic was only for pediatric massage and herbal medicine. However, after a few days at the clinic, I learned that they also practice moxibustion to treat some illnesses. After about 2 weeks at the clinic, I also realize that they did adult massage, cupping, and acupuncture. As I mentioned earlier, the Chinese work environment is very different from the American work environment. I learned just how different the two settings are, not just between working habits

but also patients. Doctors in the clinic are able to talk to one another freely, go on their phones and even take a nap during work hours. Their lunch break is about 2 hours and everyone gets along very easily, the environment that makes up the clinic is also warm and friendly. This is because in the Chinese work culture the most important thing is to establish connections with your co-workers so it's not uncommon to see co-workers become good friends. The doctors are even friendly and personal to their patients. Compared to the American work culture where you're not supposed to get too personal with your co-workers or even the clients. You're also not supposed to get distracted at work and are not allowed to take long unauthorized breaks. Patients in the clinic were very free and open. Many of the parents peeked into other patients' rooms to see what the doctors were doing and even ask questions to the doctors. Sometimes they even sit down with their child and watch the doctors perform. The doctors and the parents were always okay with this and they would all start to talk to each other. This is completely different from American doctor offices because the patients prefer their privacy and wouldn't want anyone to walk in while the doctor is giving them an examination.

Attitude

For the entirety of the internship, I feel like I have maintained a pretty healthy attitude. I tried not to let anything bother me and try to look at things from a positive perspective if I faced difficulties. Whenever I hit a wall, I tried to get over it by taking the time to think about how I could solve it or even talking to friends and family about the issue. There were a few times when my attitude wasn't good. Whenever I didn't know what was going on, I felt dejected because I wanted to learn and understand more. This would typically happen whenever I was shadowing one of the doctors, and they were explaining to the parents what the condition of the child was and their symptoms and then give them more information on how to take care of them. During

this time, they would be talking in Chinese and I could only understand some words and not all of it, I also didn't want to interrupt them and ask for a translation. A different time when I would feel dejected was when I didn't know what to do. Sometimes when we would have excursions to Huang 老师 second clinic she would get too busy to lecture us. Whenever she was too busy the other students would help her, either by doing paperwork or asking the parents questions about their child's condition. Normally, I would have to wait for it to be less busy and study on my own, however, I would also want to help them but there was nothing I could do because I couldn't talk to patients or do the paperwork. Usually, when I felt this way, I would have to remind myself that I have to do the best that I can do, which was studying.

There was a definite culture shock when it came to the workplace. I wasn't used to the idea that a work environment could be so friendly and inviting. In most of the places I worked in at home the environment was different, while no one was mean to each other and everyone got along, everyone was there to work and not too make friends. On my first day at the clinic, I was very surprised to see that Huang 老师 who was everyone's boss was eating with us and everyone was relaxed and made jokes with her. Another shock I had was when patients would walk into other examination rooms and watch and no one would mind. The first time I saw this happen I thought for sure that the patient was going to be reprimanded by the doctor or asked to leave but I was wrong instead, everyone just started talking to each other. Seeing this was very unexpected but this is because Chinese people enjoy being around other people and are more open. So, having visitors during examination makes people happier.

For future Interns

My time at the Yang Zhen Er Kang clinic was amazing and I am very grateful too have the opportunity to work there. In order to make sure you also have a great time interning at the

clinic, I wanted to leave some advice. My first advice for future interns is to try and get to know the staff. Everyone, there is very nice and friendly and is willing to help you if you need help with anything. Even if you can't speak Chinese very well body language plays a huge factor in how people perceive you. Try to eat lunch with the doctors and use a translation app on your phone to try and interact with them more. As I mentioned earlier the doctors are all very friendly and do want to get to know you more, however, they won't ask you any questions. This means that you have to be the person to put yourself out there and talk to them. From personal experiences I found that talking about friends and family from home is a good way to start a conversation with them, it'll also help if you have any pictures to show them. I also found that talking about your own culture and doing a cultural exchange is a good way to get to know them better. Then after that they will warm up to you more and start asking you more and more questions and becoming friends will follow naturally.

My second piece of advice is to make sure you study and practice the material they teach you. If you are coming from a place that only teaches about western medicine then TCM will be difficult for you to understand at first. It'll be very important to review each lesson because TCM has a lot of different information that is all connected and without some information, it'll be much easier to get confused. I highly advise that you read the extra material that Charles gives you (the two TCM books and the TCM handbooks that past students have made), this will make it easier to understand and to learn quicker. It is also important to remember not to be upset if you don't understand the information right away and asking questions is fine, the doctors will answer to the best of their ability.

My last piece of advice is that oftentimes during your internship hours the doctors may be too busy and because you don't have enough knowledge in pediatric massage you won't be

able to help them. Sometimes you may even find yourself without anything to do for a very long time. This is fine and normal, the doctors under that you most likely have very limited knowledge in TCM or pediatric massage and won't be able to help with too much. Unlike most internships where you get to learn through experience and helping doctors, in this internship you mainly learn by being taught in lectures and following the doctors around observing what they are doing. Sometimes you get to help make teas and medicine and they may ask you to complete small tasks for them but most of the knowledge you gain will be taught to you. I recommend that whenever you find yourself without something to do to either study or practice the massage techniques this way you will be prepared for the next lesson.

Conclusion

TCM has played a major role in Chinese health and culture. It is growing more and more popular outside of the country and has influenced traditional medicine in countries like Japan and Korea. During this ISP/ internship period I spent a month interning at Yang Zhen Er Kang clinic, which is a pediatric massage clinic located in Kunming. During this month I learned much about Chinese working culture and TCM. I learned a lot about the different types of plants and herbs as well as how to make some teas or soups. Then I learned about pediatric massage and different massage techniques. From this experience, I learned that just how much people trust TCM and how well both western medicine and TCM work together. With my experience, I plan using what I learn to help friends and family who have gotten sick. In the future, I plan on further studying TCM and herbal medicine.

Citation

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